1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22



inches of water for seventeen days, apart from having to cross numerous deep depressions. In some parts of Lou and Eastern Jikany, particularly in Gaajak, people build in open thornwood forest, but generally Nuer prefer to make their villages in open country, even where there is forest near-by, because their cattle are better protected from wild beasts, insect pests, and damp, and also, apparently, because millet does not do so well in wooded country. Building in the open seems also to give freedom from termites.

A Nuer homestead consists of a cattle byre and huts. Their byres are of size and workmanship that have evoked the admiration of all travellers. Their form, and the appearance of huts, may be seen in several plates, and their mode of construction is excellently portrayed in Mr. Corfield's photograph (Plate XVIII). It is only necessary to explain that the roofs are supported by trunks of trees erected inside the barns. Both byres and huts are of wattle and daub, though in Western Nuerland, where there is less forest, bundles of millet stalks are employed as rafters. Building and repairs generally take place early in the dry season when there is plenty of straw for thatching and enough millet to provide beer for those who assist in the work. During the rains fences are erected from the byres along two sides of the kraal and around huts to control the movements of cattle and to prevent them messing the homesteads and damaging the crops (Plate XVII). Grazing and the use of grass, trees, &c., is the common right of all members of a village community.

Families often change their place of residence from one part of a village to another and from village to village, and, in the case of small villages, if there have been many deaths, the cattle are poorly, there have been fights within the village, or pastures and cultivations are exhausted, the whole village community may move to a new site. After about ten years both pastures and gardens show evident signs of exhaustion on the smaller ridges, and huts and byres need rebuilding after some five years.

In dry-season camps men sleep in windscreens and women in beehive-huts, or both sexes in beehive-huts. These flimsy shelters are erected a few yards from water, generally in a semicircle or in lines with their backs to the prevailing wind, and

J: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22



342 573 are simply constructed, the roots of grasses, or occasionally stems of millet, being tightly packed in a narrow trench to make windscreens, and the tops of the grasses being bound together and plastered with dung on the outside to make huts (Plates XV (*a*), XIX (*a*), and XXI (*b*)). The whole space within a windscreen is occupied by a hearth of ashes on which the men sleep around a fire, and the openings face the kraal. If people do not intend to spend more than a few days at a site they often sleep in the open and do not trouble to erect windscreens and huts. These light dwellings can be erected in a few hours.

IV

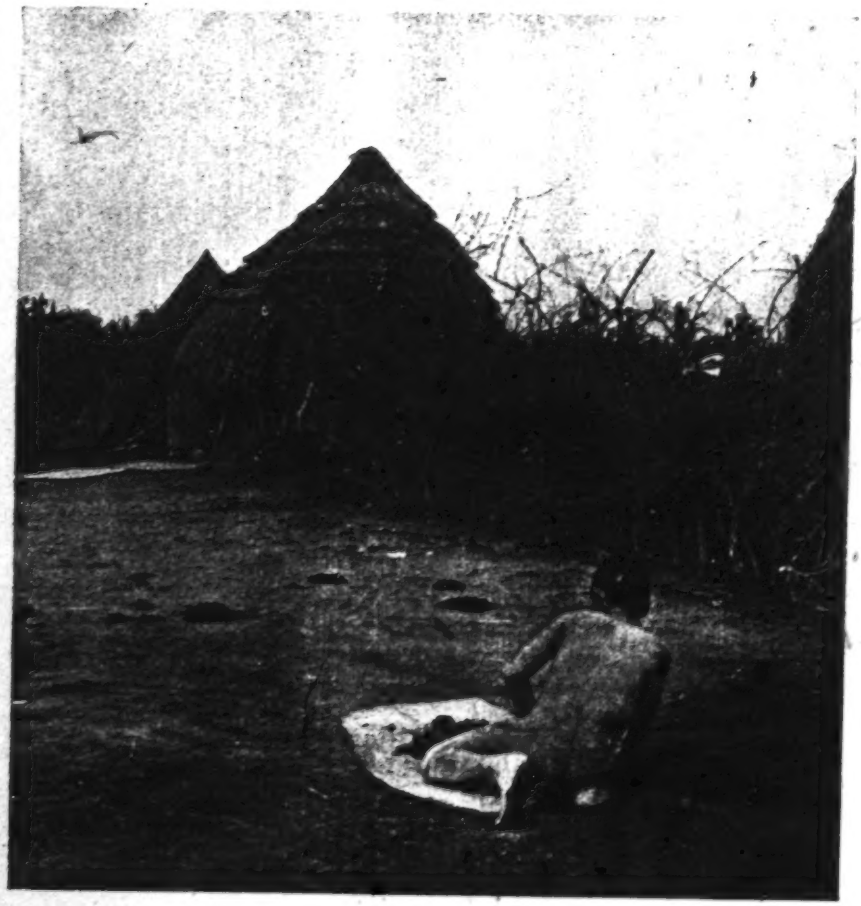
221 136 231 Another circumstance that determines Nuer movements is the abundance of insect life, which is an ever-present menace, for the cattle get little rest from stinging flies and ticks from morn till nightfall and would be worried to death if their masters did not give them some protection.

136 231 372 Mosquitoes swarm in the rains, their ravages being terrible from July to September, when, as soon as the sun sets, men and beasts have to take refuge in huts and byres. The doors of the huts are tightly closed, the air-holes blocked, and fires lit. In the centre of the byres, which house the cattle, burn large dung fires which fill them with smoke so dense that one cannot even see the cattle. Young men sleep on platforms above the fires, and if the smoke clears—the doors are shut, but it escapes through the thatched roof—they descend to pile on more fuel. By this means the beasts are enabled to obtain some rest at night. At the end of the rains while the cattle are still in the villages they are left in the kraals till their masters go to bed, when they are shut in the byres to protect them from lions. Fires are not made up so high at this season, for mosquitoes are less troublesome, since there is no surface water, the millet has been cut, and the grasses are close-cropped. Later those men who remain in the villages, while the others go into camps, often erect windscreens in the kraals and spend the night outside with any cows which have been left behind. In the dry season mosquitoes are absent except near pools and marshes, and even in the vicinity of water they are not troublesome from January to May, so that the herds can sleep in the open. Nevertheless,

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

PLATE XVII

342
291



Boy collecting dung-fuel (Lou)

[Face p. 156]

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
FJ22 Nuer FJ22



stones and remains of fires. They have been occupied by many generations of Nuer. Families are not, however, bound to any particular piece of ground, and move freely when the ground is exhausted and no longer yields a good harvest of millet or rich pasturage for the cattle. A whole village may then move and live elsewhere for some years but sooner or later they will settle there again for it is their birth place. Families and groups of kinsmen will leave a village if there are many deaths, if the cattle are poorly (*be ran gien kä kwi pieth, kä kwi ghok*), or if fights have taken place in the village. Byres and huts generally last about five years and have then to be rebuilt. Gardens are cultivated for as long as ten successive years before they are finally exhausted. When cattle and sheep and goats have grazed on village pastures (*dor*) for about the same length of time the grasses show evident signs of exhaustion. Thus in 1936 the people of Nyueny pointed out to me that after about nine years of occupation their village pastures had been overgrazed and were poor in consequence.

Village sites are owned by certain clans and sections of clans. However, ownership is mainly a matter of sentiment, based on long association between a ridge and a lineage, and since the country is not over-populated and the Nuer do not make very extensive cultivations it never becomes a legal issue. Anyone may settle in a village and the villagers will show him where he may build his huts and byre and cultivate his millet. This practically means that he may build and cultivate anywhere not already in occupation or under cultivation. Nuer are very generous in such matters. In fact, however, a man is unlikely to settle in a village unless he can claim kinship with some of the villagers, *i.e.*, is genealogically attached to the dominant lineage there. *Mar*, kinship, can generally be discovered somewhere and consequently it is usually possible to place all the occupants of a village on a single genealogical chart. There are no real problems of ownership of land among the Nuer.

Some parts of Nuerland are blessed with better village sites than others. Lou country is exceptionally well favoured in this respect though Western Nuerland has many fine ridges. Lou people say that in a year of *nyuoc*, or high river-flood, their ridges remain dry

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
FJ22 Nuer FJ22



whereas in a similar year Eastern Gaajok country is under water and cattle have to be sent into Lou country while the men fish from trees. Lou are very scornful of Eastern Jikany village sites. I once asked Wicthiel, who now lives at Mancom in Jikany country, whether he could call his present home a *gwaadh wec* (village site) and he replied "Well, it is what the Jikany call a *gwaagh wec*, but it is not what we consider a *gwaadh wec* in our own country (Lou). They just build their villages in the forest anyhow." Huts built on piles, such as one sees in parts of Dinkaland, are unknown in Nuerland.

Water is as scarce in the dry season as it is excessive in the wet season. About the beginning of December, therefore, the young men and some of the girls take most of the cattle to camps some miles from the villages and leave the rest of the women and the married men to harvest the second millet crop and repair huts and byres. A few lactating cows are left in the village to provide milk for the small children. The cattle are taken to camps partly to give them clean water and partly to pasture them. The grasses are burnt and some species spring up again a few days after they are fired. This is a good time for the cattle because they can move freely, the tall grasses which impeded them in the rains having been burnt, and because they can graze to their hearts' content on the tender young shoots.

Local conditions determine the time of leaving the village. In 1936 the first youths to take their cattle into camp from the village of Nyueny moved on November 13th, at the beginning of the Nuer month of *Kur*. This is much earlier than is usual for most villages and was due to lack of clean water at Nyueny and over-grazing of the pastures in the vicinity. The country around the village was all under water in the middle of October but was parched a month later. Most people do not move till the end of the month of *Kur* or the beginning of the month of *Tiop indit* (about the middle of December).

In Lou country the first camps are often made in thornwood forests near deep pools, but in parts of Nuerland, especially in the

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
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Everyone wakes before sunrise and satisfies the needs of nature. 512
For about three quarters of an hour after sunrise men sit by their hearths protected by windscreens and women outside their beehive grass huts chatting, smoking and gazing at the cattle which lie, still sleeping, many with their muzzles tucked into their barrels, and chew the cud. Being close together they rub their bodies against one another and lick each other. They present a medley of colour : fawn, grey, mouse, black, brown, blue and chestnut-roan, with many variations of shade and distribution.

The huts and windscreens are generally erected in a semi-circle 361
with their backs to the prevailing wind, though they sometimes form an almost complete circle and at other times are arranged in lines. Windscreens are of simple construction. A narrow trench 343
is dug for three quarters of a circle and handfuls of grass are planted, root downwards into the trench. Each handful is beaten tightly against the last one so that a solid screen of grass is formed. The grasses generally used for this purpose are *dul in lum*, a tall coarse riverside grass called *wath* (*Sorghum lanceolatum Stapf.*) and *war* (*Vetiveria nigritiana Stapf*). Where camps are made near villages millet stalks are sometimes used instead of grass. All these grasses are tall and sturdy and they bend to the wind and do not break. Men sleep in the shelter of these screens on the hearths which occupy the whole of the enclosed space. Here the fire is never allowed to go out, and from day to day the height of the hearth is slowly raised by accumulation of ashes. Women make huts in the same way as 342
men make windscreens but they bend the tops of the grasses so that they meet. They are then tied together and the sides are plastered with cattle dung. Within these flimsy shelters which contrast with the massive byres and well-built huts of their wet season villages Nuer spend about half the year. Sometimes, as at Yakwac, a camp is made in a wet season village belonging to kinsmen at the edge of a river. Then the men desert their windscreens at midday for the [512
cool interiors of the byres and the women sleep at night in the village 513]
huts instead of erecting special grass huts. But even when, as in
certain parts of Nuerland where there is no great deficiency of water 361

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
FJ22 Nuer FJ22



361 or dearth of pasturage, the people remain on their village sites or move only a short distance from them, they insist on making a camp nearby, for such is the ancient dry-season custom.

342 The windscreen (*geau*) does not seem to be used in Western Nuerland. In the camps I have seen there both sexes live in grass huts plastered with dung, the huts of married couples being rather larger than those occupied by youths or girls. The huts appear also to be more carefully constructed than in Eastern Nuerland. In 343 Nuer camps one sometimes sees a rough shelter (*geau deeni*) constructed of branches with grass, often the riverside *buor*, thrown on top to give shade for the young calves during the heat of the day. Otherwise they are taken into the huts or tethered beneath a tree.

233 In the front of the windscreens are tethered the cattle. When they are grazing the kraal is a circle studded with pegs and sprinkled with drying dung. When they come back in the evening they are tethered to these pegs. Adult cattle are placed in the centre of the kraal, the calves on the outside nearest to the windscreens where they are under the watchful eyes of their owners, and the sheep and goats in small clusters here and there between the adult cattle and the calves. Oxen of enormous size, with great spreading horns trained into artificial shapes, stand docile and lethargic, prominent among the other cattle. A man places his favourite ox in a line with the entrance to his windscreen so that he can see it without moving.

234 883 Before and during milking youths display themselves in company with their favourite oxen. Boys lead the oxen round the camp and their young owners walk behind them brandishing their spears and leaping gracefully into the air, shouting and singing the while. This display is called *rau* and is one of the customs of dry season camps. It is not practised in wet season villages because a youth does not show off before his own family but when he has a large audience, including girls whose favours he wishes to win. Youths often continue to display themselves till the cattle are driven to pasture.

234 462 Milking starts between 6-30 and 7-00. If the morning is misty it may be delayed till slightly later. As men are forbidden to milk

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22



342 361 Their huts are built with great care and skill. They are cylindrical in form with a conical roof consisting of grass, reeds, or leaves, while the walls are made of mud; and are decidedly superior to the buildings of the Dinka, Anuak, and other kindred tribes. The houses stand in small groups, sometimes only two or three together, the land for cultivation lying immediately around each house.

342 233 In the dry season the men leave their villages to seek better pasture in the swampy regions of the country. Here temporary huts of straw are erected for the young men who look after the cattle and milk them. During the night the cattle are driven into large enclosures of thorny trees; a fire of dried cow-dung is constantly kept smouldering, to protect the cattle from the stings of mosquitoes. When the rains begin to fall, about April, the people return to their villages to plant dura.

776 Very little is known about the religion of the Nuer. Miss Huffman mentions on page 56 some names of their gods, but we learn little as to their significance in the lives and beliefs of the people. While I was studying the Shilluk people in the Sudan in 1910, still another Nuer god, viz. Kot, was mentioned to me by a number of Nuer men whom I had with me for some time. This word Kot occurs in a large number of Nilotic languages, its general meaning is 'rain', but in Nuer it designates a god, the idea of this god being evidently connected with that of rain. To Kot is attributed the creation of the world, as the following report dictated to me by a native Nuer shows:[1]

[1] This record and the following ones were, together with the original Nuer text, first published in my study on the Nuer language in the *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen. Afrikanische Studien*, p. 84 ff. Berlin, 1912.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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231 [776] turn into a 'Lat' (a combination of ogre and cannibal which figures largely in folk-lore tales. Nuer firmly believe in these Lats and fear them).

Nuer, be they men, women, or children love their cattle; they are the pride of the tribe. The people delight in being among them. When a boy has his tribal marks [551] cut, he assumes an ox name in addition to his own.

[825] The cattle are always supposed to see the new moon one night before the people see it.

If a cow is sick, she is well cared for. Everything possible is done for her so far as the Nuer's knowledge goes. A wasps' nest is soaked in water and the mixture forcibly administered to the cow as a preventive against a certain fever.

A bunch of a certain kind of leaves tied about a cow's neck is supposed to help her if all is not right with her when she has just calved.

Muzzles made out of thorns are fastened on the mouth of a calf when they wish to prevent it from sucking.

The Nuer also have sheep, and numerous dogs may be seen.

[262] During the fishing season when many go to the fishing camps, the Nuer depends upon fish and milk for his food. The cattle are always taken to the fishing camp—for grazing is usually good—hence the milk supply.

### THE FISHING SEASON

226 221 When the dry season is on, the river falls fast and the Nuer is eager to fish. The rivers are full of fish, great big ones, including the Nile perch and several other large white fish which are specially desired for food. In December and January Nuer with their cattle move from the villages to the fishing camps. They build (Fig. 6) [342] bee-hive-shaped houses—even the walls are of grass.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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262 to part with some of his dura. So want is never far from
437 the door of the Nuer home.

273 A drink—more or less intoxicating, according to the amount one drinks of it—is made from dura. Nuer are very fond of it. They frequently get intoxicated enough to fight when they have had their fill of it.

### THE NUER IN BUSINESS

241 Few Nuer men engage in any business that helps others. Practically every Nuer man has a plot of ground where he may raise the family's supply of dura, but he seldom thinks of raising any to sell.

The Government has tried to interest the Nuer in raising cotton, but with no marked success so far.

326 A few men are blacksmiths and make the spears, fishing spears, and ornaments out of iron, brass, or wire. They sharpen old hoes, spears and such like, and make good money in this line. The equipment a blacksmith requires is decidedly meagre. A piece of iron to hammer on, a piece of iron to hammer with, and a fire, constitute the usual equipment, although one occasionally sees a chisel.

● 342 Some men make a reputation for themselves by their skill as roofers. The roof of a Nuer house when new is a very pretty piece of work, being quite smooth and even. It takes a good roofer to fix a roof so that the heavy tropical rains do not go through it. Men roof the houses, but the making of the long grass eaves to protect the wall from rain is considered as women's work and is left for them to do.

323 Women sometimes make earthen pots and sell or
458 trade them to others who are not so well versed in this art, but practically all women are more or less proficient in pottery.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

*Chapter Three*

# FAMILY LIFE IN NUERLAND

## THE HOUSE AND ITS FURNISHINGS

THE Nuer does not live to himself. He is a part of his 626
particular village, and his actions affect all his relatives, no matter how distant the relationship may be. This fact checks him to some extent in his misdeeds, for any infringement of Nuer law not only affects him but all his people as well. He must give heed to them and to Nuer law in general if he is to count on their support and aid in time of need (Fig. 7).

The men and boys of the village usually sleep in the 513
barn which is to be found in most villages. A house is set aside for the sleeping quarters of the girls. The women and little children sleep in the houses.

The Nuer house is conical in shape. It has mud walls 342
up to about three feet or more from the ground, then the sloping grass roof. There are no windows. A door, woven like a mat, is made of grass. If the weather is cool, a fire is made inside the house and the smoke goes out through the roof. At night the door is tightly closed in order to keep wild animals out, so the ventilation is indeed poor.

A fence of cane-stalks is made and encloses a small yard. 351
The door of this fence as well as the door of the house are made low so that one must stoop in order to get in.

The yard is swept clean—a bunch of grass tightly tied [412]
together at one end suffices for a broom. One part of the 252
enclosure is plastered with mud for a radius of two or three feet, and in the centre is a hole, also plastered, in which the women may be found pounding the dura, making use of a long pole. The dura is pounded very fine, the coarser parts being sifted out by shaking it on a grass

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*Fig.* 6. Grass house

*Fig.* 7. A group in a Nuer village

[Facing p. 48]